existing bio-fertilizer production unit in 1997-98. While considering the proposal, it was found that the existing unit had received grants of Rs. 21 lakh from North-East Council for its establishment. The State Government was requested to inform about the utilisation of these grants in the 7th plan and the capacity established from this grant. The requisite information has not been submitted consequent to which the subsequent proposal has not been processed.

Transportation charges to retailers of levy sugar

3664. SHRI LAJPAT RAI: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are allowing transportation charges to retailers of State for procuring levy sugar for central pool; and

(b) if so, at what rate?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD): (a) and (b) Government allows transportation charges to the retailers of PDS Sugar at rates prescribed in the guidelines for distribution of levy sugar in the Public Distribution System. As per present guidelines for fixing margins for wholesalers/retailers effective from 1.4.1996, transportation charges for retailers of each State is fixed on the basis of audited figures of expenditure, duly approved by the State Government concerned, incurred for previous years.

Rice specifications

3665. SHRI SUKHDEV SINGH LIBRA:
SHRI LAJPAT RAI:
SARDAR GURCHARAN SINGH TOHRA:

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) the criteria laid down for fixation of rice specifications every year for acceptance of rice in central pool;

(b) whether Punjab Government has suggested relaxation in fixation of rice specification for kharif 1999-2000 marketing season; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHRIRAM CHAUHAN): (a) Uniform specification of paddy and rice are laid down every year before the commencement of Kharif Marketing Season for procurement of paddy and rice for the Central Pool, after taking into consideration the views of the State Government and the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and also keeping in view the weather and crop conditions, stock position in the Central Pool, PFA standards, etc.

(b) and (c) The Government of Punjab had requested for relaxation in rice specification for Kharif Marketing Season 1999-2000 as under:—

1. To allow Small Brokers at 2% within the overall limit of Broken grains.

2. To enhance the limit of Damaged/Slightly Damaged Grains up to 3.5% in raw rice.

3. To enhance the maximum limit for Dehusked Grains upto 15%.

4. To allow Moisture upto 15% without any value cut.

The request of Government of Punjab was examined. However, keeping in view the interest of the consumers and also, the prolonged storage the rice may have to undergo, the relaxations sought by Government of Punjab were not agreed to.

Food Deficiency and Maternal Mortality in India

3666. SHRI SURESH KALMADI:
MISS MABEL REBELLO:

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that despite a substantial increase in foodgrains production during the 50 years of independence, half the world's hungry people are in India which is still classified by the Food and Agriculture Organisation as a "low income and food-deficit country";

(b) whether it is also a fact that maternal mortality rate among the Indian women is one of the highest in the world; and